Tells the Facts and Names the Names

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A Theory of the WTC Collapses

By Alexander Cockburn

As those CounterPunchers who read our website may have seen, we ran a piece of mine the weekend of September 9/10 attacking the conspiracy crowd claiming the 9/11/2001 attacks were an inside job, ordered by Bush and Cheney.

We don't believe this, and have always declined to make our newsletter or website a platform for those who do.

As CounterPuncher Michael Neumann remarked in a note to me after he'd read my piece:

"I think the problem of conspiracy nuttery has got worse, and is part of a general trend. There really were serious questions about the Kennedy assassination, an unusual number of them, and it wasn't too crazy to come to the wrong conclusion. There wasn't a single serious question about 9-11. But this is the age of angels, creationism, corpses all over Kosovo, Arabs suspiciously speaking Arabic, Satanic child abuse, nucular Eyraquees, and channeling. The main engine of the 9-11 conspiracy cult is nothing political; it's the death of any conception of evidence.

"This probably comes from the decline of Western power. Deep down, almost everyone, across the political spectrum, is locked in a bigotry which can only attribute that decline to some irrational or supernatural power. The result is the ascendency of magic over common sense, let alone reason."

I'll quickly resume my basic points, before moving to a very interesting piece by a physicist (and CounterPuncher) – Manuel Garcia Jr – who offers a theory for the fall of the Towers, which conspiracy advocates attribute to

(**Cockburn** *continued on page 4*)

A Century Ago, Satyagraha Began

Gandhi's 9/11

By P. Sainath

The first of the 9/11s did help change the world. That was the day Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha in South Africa first began -- September 11, 1906. Today is the 100th anniversary of that launch of his non-violent resistance movement. Gandhi was quite clear it was a war he was fighting against racism and colonial oppression in South Africa, a war he saw as touching anti-colonial sentiment in India as well, a war he felt he had a strategy for. "Only the general who conducts a campaign can know the objective of each particular move," he wrote. "And as this was the first attempt to apply the principle of satyagraha to politics on a large scale, it is necessary any day that the public should have an idea of its development."

For decades thereafter, the weapon of mass disobedience he had developed rattled the British in India. Gandhi always referred to 9 / 11, 1906 as the day it all began. "The term satyagraha was invented and employed in connection therewith," he wrote, listing several occasions where he used it again -- in India. Those who chose this form of resistance were called satyagrahis. In his words: "A Satyagrahi enjoys a degree of freedom not possible for others, for he becomes a truly fearless person. Once his mind is rid of fear, he will never agree to be another's slave. Having achieved this state of mind, he will never submit to any arbitrary action." Satyagraha was to be used again in South Africa much later. It was also used by Martin Luther King in the civil rights struggle in the United States.

On that day in Johannesburg, the Indians addressed by Gandhi were more than a little mystified by his notion that the might of the Empire could be engaged differently. It's a debate that lasts to this day. Gandhi himself acknowledged there were no 'miraculous qualities as such in satyagraha..." And that a movement which lost sight of the truth would find the technique of little use.

Yet, the struggle put the South African government on the defensive. It saw the repeal or suspension of some of the more obnoxious laws the Indians there were opposed to. Very importantly, it brought about a vital measure of Hindu-Muslim unity amongst Indians in South Africa for the first time. New factors were to make things a whole lot worse later. But at the time, it set off a process that caught on in many other parts of the British empire . Not the least within India, led by Gandhi himself.

The British had to contend with the rising of millions or ordinary people. His weapon and its allied tools helped forge momentous changes in Indian history. But this General was not for war. "War with all its glorification of brute force is essentially degrading," he wrote. "It demoralizes those trained for it. It brutalises men of naturally gentle character. It outrageous every beautiful canon of morality." That was in an era when another global figure, had declared "War is the most natural, the most commonplace thing…War is life. …all struggle is war." That was Hitler speaking.

September 11, 1973. Then it was the export not of democracy but of terror. The toppling of the Salvador Allende government in Chile was achieved that

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day by the Chilean armed forces led by Gen, Augusto Pinochet, fully supported by the US Central Intelligence Agency. The elected Allende government was pushing measures that favored its nation's poor. Even the most modest re-distribution of wealth was intolerable to the Chilean elite, also to the US corporations controlling so much of the economy.

"Make the economy scream," President Nixon ordered then CIA Director Richard Helms in 1970. The order was duly carried out. Every conceivable overt and covert action was undertaken to damage that nation's economy. "I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people. The issues are much too important for the Chilean voters to be left to decide for themselves," declared Henry Kissinger, then Secretary of State.

The 9/11 of 1973 saw what analyst and author William I. Robinson called "the bloodiest coup in Latin American history." Over 3,000 people were murdered after the armed forces bombed and stormed the Presidential Palace. Allende himself went down in the battle. Estimates of people killed in the years that followed vary from 3,000 to 20,000. Well over 100,000 people were arrested in the first three years. Many simply "disappeared."

Chile's National Stadium was used as a concentration camp. Thousands suffered gruesome tortures. Many of them were slaughtered. Among those tortured and put to death there was the legendary Victor Jara, one of Latin America's greatest musicians.

Chile's 9/11 also marked the start of the imposition by force of a neo-liberal economic model on an unwilling nation. U.S . economist Milton Friedman and his "Chicago Boys" ran riot in Chile. While the putschists raped, tortured and murdered pregnant mothers and children, neo-liberal policies worked similarly on the economy of the poor.

Some 25 years later, the United States and the Britain were still holding Gen. Pinochet's hand. The leader of Chile's bloody putsch had been arrested in London following an Interpol Red Notice. A warrant had been issued against him in Spain for atrocities his junta had committed against Spanish citizens in Chile during his 17-year dictatorship. But his old friends in the West did not desert him. (The same powers are driving trials of war criminals in Iraq and elsewhere.) Pinochet is back in Chile, though facing murder charges there too.

Latin America, though, is seeing a wave of anti-neo liberal globalization protests. A trashing of pro-US regimes., whether in Venezuela or Ecuador or Bolivia. In 2005, tiny Uruguay became the first nation in the world to forbid water privatization. Others too, are reclaiming their natural resources from foreign corporations. The world is changing, but not in the way the real authors of 9 / 11, 1973 hoped for. Moral authority in Latin America belongs to a Castro or Chavez. No pro-US leader comes anywhere close.

* * *

Five years on from 9/11, 2001, the world is a more dangerous place than it was before September 11, 2001. Acts of terror, real and presumed cause panic each month across the globe.

Tens of thousands have been slaughtered in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan alone. Both nations have been ravaged and devastated. Millions of lives have been disrupted forever. Lebanon lies shattered. And more and more flashpoints - even nuclear ones -- emerge. In a divided planet, there is one zone of agreement: the worst is yet to come.

Changing the world in terms of 'exporting democracy'has come a cropper. The bloodied streets of Iraq show us just how insane that notion was. As for Afghanistan, it gets more bizarre each month. Take the recent claim by British Foreign Office Minister Kim Howells: "Across the country progress is being made. Afghanistan had economic growth of 14 per cent last year." Well, in 2003, the same country was the fastest growing economy in the world at 21 per cent growth. More than half of that coming, as the United Nations noted, from opium. In any case, Afghanistan's figures improve if you just stop the bombing for a few hours. It's not hard when your base is zero. Or worse.

Both the fanatics who brought down the WTC and those later responding to them, stay firmly convinced they are changing the world. The world itself remains somewhat stubbornly resistant to these notions. In every society, the Muslim-non-Muslin divide has deepened as neighbor suspects and lives in fear of neighbor. The war on terror translates too, into a war of suspicions and nerves. Meanwhile the basic pretexts for the invasion of Iraq have collapsed. The US Senate finds that Saddam had no link with Al-Qaeda whatsoever. The weapons of mass destruction story has ceased to be even a joke.

Three 9 / 11s. One helped change the world for the better. Two had much in common. The bloody slaughter of innocents, the brutalization of millions, the imposition of regimes hated and despised, juntas with no legitimacy at all. Think of a Pinochet now hiding behind pleas of age, ill-health and senility to escape justice Think of an Iraqi regime whose leaders almost no one can name, or of a Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan whose writ barely runs across the presidential palace in Kabul, who has to at all times be protected from his own people by American soldiers. Think also of a Henry Kissinger who has curbed his travel in recent years for fear of facing war crimes charges in more than one country in Europe.

Think, too, of an old man who warned "An eye for an eye will make the whole world blind."

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The Return of the Taliban

By CHRIS SANDS

Kabul

All the people are inside this evening, and the feral dogs that have replaced them on the streets are roaming in packs and barking at the moon. It's always like this when the darkness takes over.

Mixing with the animal sounds is the hum of generators trying to keep the city's pulse beating. Sometimes an American plane is also audible as it flies above the mountains and homes, carrying the nightime's cargos.

Occasionally, there is a burst of gunfire or a huge explosion. It shakes people from their sleep and, for a moment, even the dogs stop in their tracks. No one is sure if they imagined it, in the same way they're not sure if those ghostly aircrafts they hear are just the stuff of nightmares. But when the sun eventually rises over Afghanistan again, the residents of Kabul get ready to face a new day no different to any other. "There will never be peace," a handsome young Pashtun, named Arshad Wardak, sighs. It is the summer of 2006, and everyone has been living with the darkness for years.

A U.S.-led coalition started Afghanistan's latest tragedy on October 7, 2001. The war made for perfect CNN viewing. Few foreign troops were involved in the fighting, and the only major casualties were civilians. Within weeks the brutal Taliban regime had been toppled, and our TV screens were filled with cheering people lining Kabul's shattered streets. For America and her allies, the picture has never again looked as rosy as it did that winter.

Kaka Tajuddin is talking animatedly at his home in the province of Panjshir. The carcasses of Soviet tanks litter the surrounding countryside, and he has a litany of old war stories to tell. He once shot a Russian commando, then robbed the corpse of its gun. The weapon is in his house now. "You think I am going to give that to [President Hamid] Karzai or Bush?" he asks.

Tajuddin is the father-in-law of Ahmad Shah Massoud, the Northern Alliance commander who led Afghanistan's anti-Taliban resistance before 9/11. That he offers scathing criticisms of his government and the war effort underlines just how bad the situation is getting.

"For five years Karzai has been sitting in his chair, but still five roads have not been built in Kabul. Everywhere is dust. The economy is very weak, people don't have electricity, they live in very poor conditions," he says.

"Just go to Kabul and look. Do you see new roads? No, they are just dust. Do you see any parks for children to play in? No. All the countries are saying they have invested millions of dollars, but where are these dollars?"

Massoud was assassinated by Al-Qaeda on September 9, 2001, in a move almost certainly designed to weaken the backlash that would result from the attacks on America two days later. 'The Lion of Panjshir' is regarded as a hero by many Afghans.

"Now the Taliban are in Logar, they are in Maidan Shah. The Americans will face the day of the Russians."

"All the soldiers of the world are here now and what are they doing? They are not helping us. The Taliban are setting fire to schools, killing doctors, killing innocent children. It's the Taliban who are doing this, but why don't you fight them? They are nearly in Kabul," says Tajuddin. "If the Americans or the Russians or anyone says they want to keep security but security is not good, it means they will be defeated. And they will be defeated soon. Now the Taliban are in Logar, they are in Maidan Shah [just outside Kabul]. The Americans will face the day of the Russians."

Tajuddin's anger only touches on the country's post-9/11 tragedy. Indeed, it is just one of the cries now emanating with increasing volume from the towns, cities, villages, deserts, mountains and fields of this beautiful land.

Ghazni is a two-hour drive south of Kabul. It is an area not usually associated with the Taliban, but today the threat of violence is real. In the province's rural districts the gun rules.

"Maybe [the security forces] can't stop the Taliban or maybe they agree with what they're doing. For six months it has been like this. Even in the daytime the Taliban have been attacking houses. They have killed a teacher, they have killed an election candidate, they kill the police, they kill any person they don't like," says Gul Habib, a Pahstun.

There are no obvious signs of reconstruction in the province's capital, Ghazni city. Apart from a group of children playing football on a patch of dirt, the place looks totally bereft of happiness. Dust hangs in the air, and everything seems in a permanent state of decay.

A local Shiite scholar blames despair for the bloodshed now engulfing the area. "I do not agree that the Taliban are getting stronger, I just believe that the government and the police are getting weaker," says Mohammed Zamin Azimi.

"Not all the people support the Taliban, but they don't support the government either. What is the government? The government is the people and if the people hate the government there is no government. That is the situation now; there is no government. Nothing has been done in the country. Karzai has been in his position almost five years and what has been done? Nothing. Lots has been promised, that's all."

Around 2,000 people – most of them insurgents – have been killed in fighting already this year, more than at any other time since the invasion. Foreign troops are among those dying regularly, blown up by suicide attackers and roadside bombs or gunned down in firefights. At the time of writing , the total number of American military personnel killed in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries since 'Operation Enduring Freedom' began stands at 272. Meanwhile, Britain and Canada are suffering from mounting casualties within their armed forces.

There are many reasons for the spiralling violence. Militants have regrouped just across the Pakistan border and are clearly adopting tactics used in Iraq. But Islamic extremists are not the only ones behind the insurgency, with popular support for armed resistance growing among the disillusioned public.

As Abdullah, a 52-year-old imam in Kabul, says, "The only thing [people] can

(**Taliban** *continued on page 6*)

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(**Cockburn** *continued from page 1*)
prepositioned explosives.

One characteristic of the nuts is that they have a devout, albeit preposterous belief in American efficiency, thus many of them start with the racist premise that "Arabs in caves" weren't capable of the mission. They believe that military systems work the way Pentagon flacks say they should work.

They appear to have read no military history, which is too bad because if they did they'd know that minutely planned operations -- let alone responses to an unprecedented emergency -- screw up with monotonous regularity, by reason of stupidity, cowardice, venality, weather, and all the other whims of providence.

The 9/11 nuts proffer what they demurely call "disturbing questions", though they disdain all answers but their own. They seize on coincidences and force them into sequences they deem to be logical and significant. Apparent anomalies that seem to nourish their theories are brandished excitedly; testimony that undermines their theories – like witnesses of a large plane hitting the Pentagon – is contemptuously brushed aside.

Of course it's very probable that the FBI or U.S. military intelligence, even the CIA, had penetrated the Al Qaeda team planning the 9/11 attacks; that intelligence reports – some are already known – piled up in various Washington bureaucracies pointing to the impending onslaught and even the manner in which it might be carried out.

The history of intelligence operations is profuse with examples of successful intelligence collection, but also of fatal slowness to act on that intelligence, along with eagerness not to compromise the security and future usefulness of the informant, who has to buttress credentials by even pressing for prompt action by the plotters. Sometime an undercover agent will actually propose an action, either to deflect efforts away from some graver threat, or to put the plotters in a position where they can be caught red-handed. In their penetrations of environmental groups the FBI certainly did this.

One notorious "deductive" leap involves flight 77, which on 9/11 ended up crashing into the Pentagon. There are photos of the impact of the "object" – i.e., the Boeing 757, flight 77 – that seem to show the sort of hole a missile might make. Ergo, the nuts assert, it WAS a missile and a 757 didn't hit the Pentagon. As regards the hole, my brother Andrew – writing a book about Rumsfeld and the DOD during his tenure – has seen photos taken within 30 minutes of Pentagon impact clearly showing outline of entire plane including wings. This was visible momentarily when the smoke blew away. And if it was a missile, what happened to the 757? Did the conspirators shoot it down somewhere else, or force it down and then kill the passengers? Why plan to demolish the towers with pre-placed explosives if your conspiracy includes control of the two planes that hit them? Why bother with the planes at all? Why blame Osama if your fall guy is Saddam Hussein?

The nuts ignore obvious crimes and blunders. They scorn the notion that the WTC towers crashed down because they were badly built as a consequence of corruption, incompetence, regulatory evasions by the Port Authority, and because they were struck by huge planes loaded with jet fuel. No, they fell because Dick Cheney's agents methodically planted demolition charges in the preceding days. It was a conspiracy of thousands, all of whom –- party to mass murder –- have held their tongues ever since.

The towers did not suddenly collapse, as if triggered by a demolition fuse. As discussed in Wayne Barrett and Dan Collin's excellent book, *Grand Illusion*, about Rudy Giuliani and 9/11, helicopter pilots radioed warnings nine minutes before the final collapse that the South Tower might well go down and, repeatedly, as much as 25 minutes before the North Tower's fall. A structural engineer in the North Towers similarly advised police he thought the structure might well be fatally compromised and would soon drop.

What Barrett and Collins brilliantly show are the actual corrupt conspiracies on Giuliani's watch: the favoritism to Motorola which saddled the firemen with radios that didn't work; the ability of the Port Authority to skimp on fire protection, the mayor's catastrophic failure in the years before 9/11/2001 to organize an effective unified emergency command that would have meant that cops and firemen could have communicated; that many firemen wouldn't have unnecessarily entered the Towers; that people in the Towers wouldn't have been told by 911 emergency operators to stay in place; and that firemen could have heard the helicopter warnings and the final Mayday messages that prompted most of the NYPD men to flee the Towers.

That's the real political world, in which Giuliani and others have never been held accountable. The nuts disdain the real world because, like much of the left and liberal sectors, they have promoted Bush, Cheney and the neocons to an elevated status as the Arch Demons of American history, instead of being just one more team running the American empire, a team of more than usual stupidity and incompetence (characteristics I personally favor in imperial leaders). The conspiracy nuts have combined to produce a huge distraction,

Now for Manuel Garcia, Jr. Manuel wrote an interesting piece for our site last year on the collapse of the levees in New Orleans after hurricane Katrina. He's a native New Yorker who works as a physicist at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California with a PhD in Aerospace & Mechanical Engineering, from Princeton. His technical interests are generally in fluid flow and energy, specifically in gas dynamics and plasma physics; and his working experience includes measurements on nuclear bomb tests, devising mathematical models of energetic physical effects, and trying to enlarge a union of weapons scientists. Today, he believes an immediate shift to green energy technologies should be the highest political and technical priority, to both quench the global class war and to quickly achieve the UN's Millennium Development Goals. Like his father, also Manuel is an amateur poet. Here's his take, as outlined in his letter to me:

Garcia's Theory of Why the WTC Buildings Fell

"Your piece, The 9-11 Conspiracy Nuts, was right on target, to my way of thinking. It is so easy to spin conspiracies when you ignore Occam's Razor and pile on assumptions to preserve an underlying bias, despite facts and historical experience. As you note, anyone who has read any military history will know how easily it is for plans to be scrambled by human failings, the unexpected forces of nature and what can only be called the caprices of fate. Robust plans are really very simple and they rely on individuals who are well trained to be able to apply that training, and the resources at their disposal, as the opportunities of the moment allow, in

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order to advance a tactical objective.

"One item I have thought about is the contention that the WTC buildings collapsed at terminal velocity (free fall), and that this must indicate the use of pre-placed explosives, as in building demolitions. The assumption in this claim is that the collapse 'should have' been slower if the frame below the descending collapse front was intact and thus 'resisting'.

I have not done any engineering calculations on this, however, I can see how the buildings could collapse as observed, without invoking a conspiracy of sabotage, even for WTC 7, the shorter building that did not suffer an airplane strike.

"I think it possible for shock waves to have run up and down the buildings, bouncing between the collapse front and the foundation, and these shock wave could have weakened, possibly at points broken, the bolts and rivets holding the joints of the framework.

"This is not an esoteric idea, it would occur in auto crashes (tests and accidents), and can probably be observed in computer simulations. Modern autos are designed to have crushable ends, to absorb the energy of impact preferentially, thus sparing the passenger compartment. It is unlikely that any such consideration went into the design of the metalwork of the World Trade Center buildings. Their frames were probably of a uniform rigidity, and a sharp impact anywhere would necessarily send out stress or shock waves, as the transient response of the structure seeking to equilibrate to the force of a new loading.

"This is like striking a bell. It 'rings'at a frequency characteristic of its rigidity and shape, and it eventually spreads the stress of the new load throughout itself, as an additional stress if it is a constant load (like a new weight), or an added amount of heat -- what the bouncing vibrations devolve to -- if the load was a transient blow. So, it might be that the WTC buildings 'shattered', perhaps not perfectly like a bullet through a glass pane (imagine seeing one of Egerton's high speed film clips) but more like the shattering of the safety glass of an automobile windshield (with plastic sheeting bonded between layers of glass).

"The collapse of the heat-weakened frame (blast and heat from airplane fuel tank explosions and fires, fed by plastic furnishings in the offices) at the impact zone would be the onset of an impulsive load on the lower structure, as the descending mass of the top floors collapsed the impact zone. The sudden imposition of the momentum of the top floors -- our hammer -- onto the structure below the impact zone was too sudden for the structure to resist by a uniform increase in the stress throughout the body of the metal framework, impact zone-to-bottom. So, the entire force of resistance would be carried by a short length of structure (perhaps only a few floors, even one) immediately below the impact zone, and this might have fatally ruptured local joints -- our shattering effect. This local stress concentration would race along the structure, moving the high stress condition to fresh material.

"Thus, each section of the lower structure would experience a brief time of extremely high stress as the wave passed

Conspiracy ravings and other distractions into irrationality sap energy.

through it. On reaching the foundation, it would shake the ground, basically an earthquake, and part of the energy would also reflect back up the structure. In this way, the shrinking length of the lower structure would be experiencing a likely increase in both the average level of stress, as well as more frequent passage of shock waves across any given floor. The final impact of the collapsed mass into the foundation would send the energy radially outward through the ground as an earthquake (the deflection of the ground in resistance to the momentum of the fall).

"I think WTC7 could have collapsed as a result of weakening by fires, caused by falling burning debris, and the earthquakes from the collapse of the tall towers.

"I am sure these effects can be calculated, probably by engineers and scientists who study the mechanics and dynamics of complex structures under earthquake loading. To offer this hypothesis as a "proof" would require such calculations, which could be verified by others. I am not able to produce that level of verification, so I leave this as a suggestion, within the spirit of Occam's Razor, of seeking explanations for the WTC building collapses that require the fewest number of ad hoc assumptions (e.g., no conspiracies).

"The essential point here is that buildings, bridges and other extended structures can be seen as antennas that pick up and transmit mechanical vibrations. A famous example is the collapse of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge in 1937, by the action of wind vortexes shed at the resonance frequency of the bridge (you can find the film clip on the internet). Like any bell, each structure has its natural frequency, and if a force strikes it in harmony with that frequency (synchronously, or at the resonance frequency) then the transmission of energy from the load to the structure is very efficient (mathematically, it is perfect at resonance).

"During the sequence of forcings that occurred during the collapse of the three WTC buildings, there may have been some nearly resonant transfers of mechanical energy, and these may have created 'explosive' levels of stress at enough joints to shatter the framework sufficiently that the collapses we observed were of already broken buildings.

"Your larger point is most important. Conspiracy ravings and other distractions into irrationality and fantasy sap energy and focus that could be used to better effect, both personal and social. There really are some conspiracies out there, but the worst ones are all too easily seen -- power does not depend on subtlety."

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(**Taliban** *continued from page 3)*
do is fight against the government and I am telling them they can do that. They can pick up a gun and fight against the government."

Afghans frequently talk about widespread corruption among officials and foreign aid workers, economic misery, anarchy, and their anger at the international community's failure to effectively tackle any of these issues.

While billions of dollars has been pumped into the country, the money has not trickled down to the poorer sections of society. According to the U.S. State Department, America alone gave more than $10.3 billion between the fiscal years 2001 and 2006.

Yet even in Kabul there is only sporadic electricity, children go to school in crumbling buildings peppered with bullet holes, and unemployment levels are sky high. Away from the capital, the situation is far worse.

Graves line the highway leading to Kandahar. They stand in places where martyrs once fell, killed by the bombs, bullets and missiles of recent wars. But these ugly piles of stone holding up ragged flags are more than just monuments to the past. As you move further south and edge closer to the blood-red horizon, every old cemetery becomes a warning for the future.

"A few kilometres away there are Talibs and sometimes we hear the sounds of fighting, the sounds of helicopters flying. A lot of explosions happen inside Kandahar," says Najma Rahimi.

She is a young woman who loves her job as a teacher. But late last year a bomb was thrown at her school by suspected militants. Although there were no casualties, the message was clear: women should not work outside the home and girls do not have the right to an education.

Yet many of the local men still long for the return to power of Mullah Mohammed Omar and his devout followers.

"There have been a lot of changes, but still people are against women. We can't walk in Kandahar alone – five or six of us walk together," says Rahimi.

This is the Taliban's spiritual heartland and indiscriminate suicide attacks are now a regular occurrence here. When Afghans travel outside the city and visit the province's rural areas, they can be threatened just for listening to music or not having a beard.

Yet many of the local men still long for the return to power of Mullah Mohammed Omar and his devout followers. They blame the poor security on the foreign troops in their midst, not the jihadis. The kind of U.S. air strike that killed scores of militants and 16 civilians here in May only adds fuel to this fire.

Abdul Mobin, who joined the Taliban soon after its creation in 1994, says: "The Talibs who are fighting have to fight. If they come back to Kandahar to live normally they will be caught by the Americans and sent to Guantanamo. If they go to Pakistan they will be caught. It's not their fault - they have no choice but to fight."

The 25-year-old is softly spoken and has a closely cropped beard. He worked as a civil servant in Mullah Omar's government. "I can't tell you if [the insurgency] will get stronger or not. But I can tell you one thing: No one can defeat them, no one can finish them. All the world can come together and it will not finish them because it is written in the Qur'an," he says.

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